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FM AMEMBASSY OSLO
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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OSLO 001496

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DEPT FOR EUR/NB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/08/2016
TAGS: [ENRG](#) [NO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: NORWAY: MANAGING THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

Classified By: Ambassador Whitney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) Summary. On December 6, MFA State Secretary Liv Monica Stubholt, who recently took on the US portfolio, met with the Ambassador for a tour d'horizon. Both agreed that key ways to deepen the already strong relationship included increasing educational exchanges, finding joint projects regarding the High North, and highlighting our joint efforts in Afghanistan and other global hotspots. In areas where we do have disagreements, both wanted to move from simply ensuring the other party was not surprised at announcements to consulting more deeply and further in advance on these issues. Monthly meetings were established to do this. End Summary.

Reviewing the Relationship

2. (C) MFA State Secretary Stubholt recently took over the US portfolio and met with the Ambassador on December 6 to review the relationship. She is pleased with her new responsibility and looks forward to increasing and broadening her engagement to further foster the relationship. She noted that we have a wide range of common interests and it is important not to forget the many obvious points of agreement. The relationship should not be problem driven, but rather a comprehensive whole that reflects our many positive issues. She is worried about the declining numbers of Norwegians studying in the US, which has a measurable effect on the relationship.

3. (C) The Ambassador agreed on the importance of students, saying that people-to-people ties are the heart of our relationship and that he is extremely committed to increasing educational exchanges. He noted his plans to travel with the Norwegian Ambassador to the US to visit American universities and encourage more exchanges and highlighted the many ways the Embassy is promoting exchanges in Norway.

4. (C) Turning to the broader relationship, the Ambassador reviewed the "no surprises" policy and the plans to move towards a deeper consultative process prior to decisions being finalized. He noted the cluster bomb initiative and other decisions could have benefited from fuller consultation prior to announcement and welcomed plans to have monthly meetings to ensure deeper consultations. He agreed on the importance of highlighting our positive agenda, which ranges from anti-corruption efforts to the High North.

High North

5. (C) Both sides welcomed the bilateral High North energy discussions taking place December 7 (see septel) as an important recognition of our common interest in the Arctic regions. Stubholt explained that the GON wants to be open

and transparent about the High North, keeping in mind its international character. She noted that Russia's role and climate change issues, both key to the High North, require international solutions. She was instrumental in drafting the strategy paper that the GON just released on the High North (see septel) and said it was essentially an invitation for other countries to identify areas of common interest in which progress could be made. Proposals, which included funding a modern research ship, mapping the seabed, and encouraging more settlement in the High North, may have greater appeal if there is shared interest. The Ambassador welcomed the GON's initiative and promised to provide a list of possible joint activities.

Working Together Around the World

¶6. (C) Turning to the many global hot spots where the GON and US have common interests, the Ambassador encouraged Stubholt to consider how we can better highlight our shared efforts to the Norwegian people. Stubholt agreed that our joint efforts in Somalia, Sudan, and Sri Lanka lead to stronger bilateral ties and are a key part of our relationship. She noted the GON's interest in Cuba and explained that the MFA hopes to visit the State Department soon with its Cuban experts to discuss the road forward.

¶7. (C) On Afghanistan, the Ambassador welcomed the GON's decision to contribute to the NATO NRF and recent PM statements that there are no restrictions on Norwegian troops serving in Southern Afghanistan. He hoped that the GON will be able to make further force contributions in Afghanistan, stating that it is critical for NATO to succeed throughout Afghanistan. Stubholt said that there is an artificial division between North and South Afghanistan in the Norwegian political debate, but reiterated the government line that the

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GON has already made a decent contribution in Afghanistan.

¶8. (C) Referring to the current Parliamentary budget debate, Stubholt noted that there is a growing focus on human rights issues. Specifically, the opposition is questioning whether the GON has toned down its human rights dialog with Russia in order to gain cooperation in the High North and elsewhere. She argued that the GON has not and pointed out that only two days ago the FM raised the issue with Russian officials. Norway continues to stress concerns about Belarus, the rights of journalists in Russia, and the denial of visas for Norwegian journalists. Norway is also focusing on the rights of indigenous people, especially the Sami who live in northern Norway and Russia.

¶9. (C) Answering questions on UN Reform and the Human Rights Council, Stubholt said that UN reform remains a central issue for her government. Norway is a good friend of the UN, but is also a demanding customer seeking efficiency and professionalism. Norway is urging that the UN speak with one voice in developing countries, avoiding disparate views from UN agencies and a resulting lack of accountability for the UN. While the issues are complicated, reform is clearly needed. On the Human Rights Council, Norway wants it to work. To do that, it must have support from key players such as the US and thus must listen to US concerns about its overwhelming focus on Israel.

EU and Turkey

¶10. (C) The DCM welcomed Norway's statement supporting the EU keeping a door open to Turkey's inclusion. Stubholt said her government will focus on this and on enlargement generally. For Norway, enlargement is important both because it affects the relationship with the EU and also because new EU members become members of the EEA, thus affecting Norway's trade relationships.

Local Issues: the NEC and the Pension Fund

¶11. (C) The Ambassador briefed Stubholt on the status of the NEC and reiterated his concern about the Ministry of Finance's ethical investing process for the Norwegian pension fund. He stressed that the pension fund is about to become the largest such investor in the world and as such has a powerful role to play as a model for others. It should be aware of its power and ensure its processes are fair and transparent.

Looking Ahead

¶12. (C) Stubholt will be traveling to the US in February or March and asked for Embassy input into her schedule. She also noted an upcoming Corporate Social Responsibility Conference that will include many international speakers and which offers an opportunity for US involvement. Both sides looked forward to regular meetings to consult on the relationship.

Bio Note

¶13. (C) Stubholt is from the Center Party. An attorney specializing in EU trade and community law, she entered politics over 10 years ago and has previously served as Central Advisor to the Center Party Parliamentary Group. Her party's rural base is especially interested in keeping the countryside populated and in providing infrastructure and services to far-flung areas. She is the GON lead on High North issues and is passionate about them. Unusual for Norway, Stubholt is vocally Christian, wearing a belt with a prominent cross when briefing the diplomatic corps recently. Her passing reference to God in a discussion with the Ambassador was a rare occurrence here. Relatively, outgoing and enthusiastic, Stubholt should be an effective advocate for our common interests.
Whitney